



Establishing pastures - Readers' Note

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First-year management of newly sown pasture

Key management goals

Graze early to control competition from ryegrass

Ryegrass seedlings are much more vigorous than clover seedlings and will quickly smother out the clover unless they are controlled. To reduce the grass and allow light in to the clover seedlings, and to stimulate tiller development in the ryegrass, graze the pasture as soon as the grass seedlings cannot be pulled out easily by hand. They should be 10–15 cm tall; this is usually 4–6 weeks after sowing, depending on weather.

Graze intensively

Graze the pasture down to leave 4–6 cm stubble and repeat the grazing whenever the grass reaches the 3-leaf stage of development. This should give effective competition control for the clover and maximise ryegrass growth.

Remove the seed heads and flowering tillers in spring to stimulate new vegetative tiller development so that effective ryegrass production can continue into the next year. Pasture topping, cutting for silage or heavier grazing with dry stock might be required. Reproductive tillers have no further growth potential after they have set seed, they produce low quality feed, and they drain nutrients away from the productivity of vegetative tillers. While reproductive tillers are present on the plant there is no stimulus for the plant to produce new vegetative tillers. Removal of reproductive tillers will also reduce the potential for ryegrass staggers from high-endophyte ryegrass cultivars.

Don't damage the new pasture

Set the stocking rate to reduce the pasture height from 15cm to 4cm in 24 hours with strip grazing using an electric fence. Back-fencing is preferable to ensure that the pasture is not grazed for more than 3 days. Pasture growth will be seriously restricted if stock are allowed to graze over an area that has already been grazed. The vigour of the young seedlings will be reduced through loss of leaves that emerge after grazing and reduction in carbohydrate availability to the young plants.

Avoid trampling and pugging damage

New pasture seedlings are vulnerable to trampling and pugging damage. When soil is wet and susceptible to pugging damage, use young stock for the first grazing; they cause less damage than milkers or dry cows. If the soil is dry, use cows.

No silage or hay production in the first year

Attempting to produce silage or hay from a new pasture in its first spring will be detrimental to both ryegrass and clover survival and production. Where possible, avoid hay and silage making in the first spring. Shutting the paddock up for silage will produce grass that is much taller and more competitive with clover than under effective grazing. Damage can be reduced and quality of silage can be enhanced by using 4-week shut-up periods before harvest.

Clover runners can be extensively damaged by being cut close to the ground

for silage. The growing points of many of the vegetative tillers of ryegrass can also be removed, and the potential for further production from those tillers would be lost. The plant would have to produce new tillers to remain productive. This is a much slower process than regrowth from an existing tiller. The ryegrass has little potential to produce new tillers in summer. Take care to ensure that as many

tillers as possible survive in spring and summer so that they are present in autumn to begin rapid growth, when the weather is ideal for ryegrass growth.

Allowing dryland perennial grass pastures to seed in the first year will allow regeneration from seed should the perennial grass die from lack of summer rain in the first year.